

Chapter 4: Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)

Overview

The Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) measures the progress that English language learners (ELLs) make in acquiring the English language. Title III, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to conduct annual statewide English language proficiency assessments for ELLs in grades K–12 in the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Prior to the NCLB Act, Texas developed and administered English language proficiency tests in the domain of reading in fulfillment of Texas state law.

TELPAS assessments are performance-based and holistically rated, with the exception of the reading assessments for grades 2–12, which are administered as multiple-choice tests. For each language domain TELPAS measures four levels, or stages, of increasing English language proficiency: beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high.

TELPAS measures learning in alignment with the Texas English language proficiency standards (ELPS), which are part of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum. The ELPS outline the instruction that ELLs must receive to support their ability to develop academic English language proficiency and acquire challenging academic knowledge and skills. The English language proficiency standards contain second language acquisition knowledge and skills that ELLs are expected to learn as well as proficiency level descriptors that characterize the four English language proficiency levels.

TELPAS and TAKS are used to show the extent to which districts and the state meet federal Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) accountability indicators that are specific to the English language proficiency and academic achievement of ELLs. Composite performance rather than individual language domain results are used in TELPAS AMAO indicators. For information about how TELPAS composite results are generated, see Appendix 7 in the 2005–2006 Technical Digest, which can be found online at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/techdigest/>. More information about AMAO accountability indicators is available in the No Child Left Behind section of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website at <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/>.

TELPAS Reading Tests for Grades 2–12

A revised version of the multiple-choice TELPAS reading tests was implemented in spring 2008. The new assessment is similar to its predecessor, the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (2000–2007), except that it

- assesses more academic language encountered in mathematics and science instruction;
- contains more questions that assess the advanced and advanced high proficiency levels;
- adds a grade 2 assessment in place of the previous holistically rated assessment;
- is administered in six rather than four grade clusters; and
- is to be administered as an online assessment.

Development of the Revised Assessment

As with any component of the Texas Student Assessment Program, TEA involved educators and test experts in the various phases of developing the new assessment. In the 2004–2005 school year, committees of Texas educators helped design the new test and create prototype reading selections and test items. Since spring 2005, both small-scale pilots and large-scale field tests have been conducted to study the feasibility of online testing and examine student performance data in both paper and online administration modes. Committees of educators reviewed field-test items for the new assessment both before and after field testing. As part of the ongoing process to replenish the item banks, committees of Texas educators will continue to convene to review new items before and after annual field testing.

Online Testing

State legislation in Texas provided an initial impetus for increasing online testing within the state. Voluntary online test administrations of selected TAKS and end-of-course tests were offered first, with generally small numbers of students participating. Advisory groups of ELL education specialists and district administrators supported efforts to explore administering the revised TELPAS reading tests exclusively online. When development of the revised TELPAS tests began, school districts were notified of the goal to implement the tests as an online testing program. Districts thus had three to four years to prepare to give online assessments to the state's more than 450,000 ELLs in grades 2–12. Plans were also made to develop a paper version of the revised tests to use for special circumstances.

In spring 2006, the grade 2 TELPAS reading field test included an online pilot component designed to examine the feasibility of online administrations for ELL second-grade students. The results and district feedback were positive. In spring 2007, large-scale online field testing of TELPAS reading items for grades 2–12 was conducted.

Although the new reading assessments were implemented in spring 2008, districts were told that they would have until spring 2009 to give the tests exclusively online. In spring 2008, the tests were offered in both paper and online modes. In preparation for the future, districts were encouraged to administer the tests to at least two-thirds of their ELLs, and they were instructed to give the test in a single mode within a grade. A total of 316,814 students in grades 2–12 took the 2008 TELPAS reading tests online.

A comparability study was conducted to evaluate the mode effect between online and paper administrations. A matched-sample design was used to ensure that sampled students were similar in certain key variables. The sampled students were then compared on their raw scores. The results indicated that that students performed at the same level on paper and online in grade cluster 10–12 but that students in grade 2 to grade 9 performed better on paper than online. To adjust for the mode effects, different score conversion tables were used for the online and paper tests in grades 2–9.

Proficiency Level Standards and Vertical Scales

Standards for the revised TELPAS reading tests were established using performance from the first operational online assessment in spring 2008. Second language acquisition experts, assessment experts, and Texas practitioners met in the summer of 2008 to recommend proficiency-level raw-score cut points, which were approved later by the Commissioner of Education. More information about the process followed to establish the proficiency-level standards may be found in Chapter 14 of this digest.

A vertical scale was established for the TELPAS reading tests. Across adjacent grade levels, a set of common items were administered and student performance was compared to calculate the growth from the lower grade cluster to the higher grade cluster. The base grade for the vertical scale was set at grade 2. This scale score system results in scale scores in the approximate range of 200 to 950 and is flexible enough for development of future test forms.

Results of the comparability study between online and paper described in the section above and results of the vertical scale studies were implemented to generate the TELPAS scale score conversion tables. The conversion tables are published on the TEA website. The results from the spring 2008 assessment were reported to districts in September 2008.

More in-depth information about the construction of the vertical scales can be found in [Chapter 15](#) of this digest. Results of the TELPAS comparability studies can be located online in the Texas Education Agency Technical Report Series at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/techdigest/>.

More information about the TELPAS reading tests for grades 2–12 is available in the TELPAS Reading Information Booklet posted on the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/rpte/>.

TELPAS Holistically Rated Assessments

The TELPAS holistically rated components assess reading in K–1 and listening, speaking, and writing in K–12. These components have been administered since 2003–2004. To conduct these assessments, teachers are specially trained to holistically rate the English language proficiency of ELLs based on an evaluation of their writing, classroom observations, and daily interactions with the students. Writing in grades 2–12 is assessed through a collection of students’ classroom writing assignments.

The TELPAS holistically rated components were developed by the Texas Education Agency in collaboration with test development contractors, bilingual/ESL consultants, and members of an ELL focus group composed of teachers, bilingual/ESL directors, assessment directors, campus administrators, and university professors. Like the TELPAS reading tests for grades 2–12, these assessments are aligned with the ELPS and designed to assess the English communication skills that ELLs need to engage meaningfully and successfully in learning the academic knowledge and skills required by the state. The holistically rated assessments draw upon second language acquisition research, research-based standards, the experience of Texas practitioners, and observational assessment practices.

The Texas Education Agency chose to implement holistically rated assessments for the following reasons:

- This assessment method is integrally linked with sound classroom instructional practice, measures the very English students use to learn the state-required academic knowledge and skills, and has the potential for making a significant, positive impact on student learning.
- The training teachers receive in the holistic rating and classroom observation process helps them better understand and meet the needs of English language learners.
- The assessment method does not require annual field testing, which takes up instructional time.
- The administration itself does not require students to lose instructional time.
- Holistically rated assessments do not have the logistical drawbacks associated with tape-recorded or individually administered speaking and listening assessments required by other types of English language proficiency tests.

TELPAS Holistic Rating and Training Process

For the administration of the TELPAS holistically rated components, districts identify their K–12 ELLs and designate teachers to observe and rate the students’ English language proficiency as they work with students in daily instruction. The rating process is designed to capture an overall level of English language acquisition and is holistic rather than a measure of isolated skills. Teachers are trained to use the ELPS proficiency level descriptors (PLDs) as holistic rating rubrics to assign proficiency ratings of beginning,

intermediate, advanced, or advanced high in each domain assessed. The ratings are submitted to Pearson with the students' TELPAS reading tests, and performance reports are generated and distributed to the districts. The PLDs can be found online at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/rpte/telpasrater/spring2008pld.pdf>.

TELPAS raters receive annual holistic rating training from individuals trained directly by TEA. Since 2005–2006, the TELPAS training model for grades 2–12 has included a qualifying component. The qualifying component of TELPAS rater training requires teachers to rate authentic student writing collections in accordance with the PLDs. Individuals successful on the qualifying activities, which are administered online, receive a qualification certificate. Since 2005–2006, campuses have also been required to use and document state-approved rating verification procedures that support the validity and reliability of the live assessment.

Since 2007, comprehensive online training courses have been used as an integral part of the face-to-face training of new raters and to refresh the rating skills of returning raters. The courses contain numerous student writing collections and video segments in which ELLs demonstrate their speaking and listening skills in authentic Texas classroom settings. The courses standardize the training and rating process by giving teachers practice in applying the scoring rubrics and by providing teachers with detailed feedback before they rate students for the live assessment.

To monitor the adequacy of training in support of the assessment's validity and reliability, school districts and TEA track qualification and course participation and performance electronically. By the end of the 2007–2008 school year, more than 118,000 qualification certificates had been awarded to Texas teachers. The percent of teachers meeting qualification requirements has been 90% or higher each year. Teachers not successful in qualifying, if they are assigned to be raters, are required to be supported by qualified raters during the live assessment.

TELPAS Audits

Since the 2004–2005 school year, the Texas Education Agency has conducted annual audits of the TELPAS assessment processes. Sampling procedures have been used to require district and campus testing personnel and raters to respond to audit questionnaires about assessment procedures followed and the quality of the training received for each language domain assessed.

For TELPAS writing, annual audits have been conducted from 2005 through 2008. TELPAS writing involves using writing proficiency level descriptors and student writing collections from classroom assignments to assign student English language proficiency levels. For the audit, sampled school districts submit the student writing collections that were rated for the writing component of the assessment. Trained audit raters re-rate the writing collections to monitor how well district raters apply the PLDs as holistic rating rubrics during the live assessment.

For TELPAS listening and speaking, a small pilot audit was conducted in May 2008 to supplement existing validity evidence. Trained audit raters went to selected districts to observe ELL students and provide listening and speaking verification ratings. The goal of this small pilot was to examine the viability of this method of auditing listening and speaking rating efficacy and the feasibility of conducting this type of audit on a larger scale.

Please refer to the reliability and validity chapters (Chapter 16, Reliability and Chapter 17, Validity) for more information on TELPAS writing audits and listening and speaking audits.

Additional Sources of Information

More information about the TELPAS assessments can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/rpte/>.